

Educating to a Culture of Fraternity in Schools: A Christian Perspective

(*This is a speech delivered by Msg. Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage Indunil Janakaratne, the Under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Panel Discussion organized by The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue on Education for Peace in a Multi-religious World at Palais des Nations, Geneva on 10th of December 2018*)

Mr. Moderator,

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Inter Religious Dialogue, I would like to thank the organisers for extending me an invitation to be in this timely and important panel discussion.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (*Matthew 5:9*). This call of Jesus to be peacemakers is offered to all his disciples. According to the vision of Jesus, God is the Father of the entire human family and all human persons are brothers and sisters. For this vision Jesus lived, laboured, suffered and died. This is the vision and mission Jesus entrusts to all his disciples: “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you” (*John 20, 21*).

Peace is a yearning and hope dwelling within all of us. Moreover, peace is a core value of all religions. Yet, we daily hear the cry of the victims of violence – domestic, economic, cultural, socio-political, psychological and environmental. These multiple social scourges are signs not only of a profound lack of fraternity, but also of the absence of a culture of solidarity. Sadly, violence begets other social evils. Why do we have so much violence in our world and how do we end it? How can we build a fraternal society through humanizing education?

Pope Francis notes that “fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace” (Message for World Day of Peace 2014, *Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace*, n. 1). He further says that “daily acts of selfishness, which are at the root of so many wars and so much injustice”, prevent us from seeing others “as beings made for reciprocity, for communion and self-giving” (*ibid*, n. 2). Such selfishness inevitably leads people to draw boundaries that secure their safety and identity by excluding those who are ‘not us,’ who are ‘them.’ We live in a world where all too often the ‘other’ is seen as a threat and consequently, is treated as an inferior, a nonperson, or someone to be feared and eliminated if possible. Today, many people have been deprived of equal protection and rights and are treated as second-class citizens within their own countries.

Moreover, a “globalization of indifference,” a “throw away” mentality, and new ideologies characterized by rampant individualism, egocentrism and materialistic consumerism weaken social bonds and human coexistence. That the contemporary ethical crisis is basically a crisis of faith is affirmed by Pope Francis, who says, “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast” (*Evangeli Gaudium*, n.152). He also insists that “before all else we need to keep alive in our world the thirst for the absolute, and to

counter the dominance of a one-dimensional vision of the human person, a vision which reduces human beings to what they produce and to what they consume: this is one of the most insidious temptations of our time” (*Audience with Representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the Different Religions*, 20 March 2013).

Since violence in the world is the outward manifestation of violence in human hearts, it follows that we can positively influence our outer world by changing our inner worlds. The urgency and universality of the call to followers of all religions to be peacemakers in our world are unquestionable. To build a world of fraternity, it is vitally important that we join forces to educate people, particularly the children and the young, to seek fraternity, to live in fraternity and to dare to build fraternity.

The school has been thought of as the institution that forms the citizens of tomorrow. Since today’s social problems are often the result of the failure of education to promote fraternal humanism that is based on a culture of dialogue, there is a need to humanize education. Pope Francis notes, “Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature” (*Laudato Si’*, on Care for Our Common Home, 2015, 215). According to the Congregation for Catholic Education, “Humanizing education means putting the person at the centre of education, in a framework of relationships that make up a living community, which is interdependent and bound to a common destiny. This is fraternal humanism” (*Educating to fraternal humanism, Building a “civilization of love”*, n. 8.) The Church always affirms that fraternity is generally first learned in the family. Besides, peace at home teaches children to live in love, tolerance and fraternity. On the other hand, a culture of violence can contribute to deform the personality of the children and may even produce violent people.

Christian schools exist to help students deepen their faith and their own identity as well as to prepare them to live in a multi-religious and multi-cultural world. A humanized education has the following characteristics:

1. It deals with the personal, moral and social abilities of those who participate in the educational process.
2. It does not simply ask the teacher to teach and students to learn, but urges everyone to live, study and act in accordance with the values of fraternal humanism.
3. It does not aim to create division and divergence, but rather offers places for meeting and discussion to create valid educational projects.
4. It is an education that is sound and open, that pulls down the walls of exclusivity, promoting the richness and diversity of individual talents and extending the classroom to embrace every corner of social experience in which education can generate solidarity, sharing and communion (cf. *Educating to fraternal humanism, Building a “civilization of love,”* n. 10).
5. The school thus becomes a place for dialogue and serene exchanges to encourage attitudes of respect, listening, friendship and a spirit of collaboration (cf. *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* 17).
6. All children and young people must have the same possibilities for arriving at the knowledge of their own religion as well as of elements that characterize other religions (cf.

ibid, n.18).Principals and teachers need to make interfaith education part of goal setting for the school.

7. The knowledge of other ways of thinking and believing can conquer fears and enrich ways of thinking about other persons and their spiritual traditions (cf. *ibid*, n.18).
8. Care needs to be taken when presenting information about the various religions to avoid stereotypical images and unbalanced views. In the school, young people can learn to counter violent extremist narratives and to build peaceful and inclusive societies.
9. In the context of an open dialogue among cultures, different religions can and must make a decisive contribution to forming an awareness of common values, particularly among the children.This also includes the preservation of creation,which is now essential for the pacific coexistence of humankind.

Only by changing education can we change the world. Therefore, promoting a culture of peace for all depends on a culture of encounter and respect. A humanized education can lay the foundation for fraternal humanism. Let me conclude with the words of Pope Francis addressed to some teachers and students from Tokyo: “Dialogue is very important for our own maturity, because in confronting another person, confronting other cultures, and also confronting other religions in the right way, we grow; we develop and mature ... This dialogue is what creates peace” (Pope Francis, *Speech to Students and Teachers of the Seibu Gakuen Bunry Junior High School of Saitama, Tokyo*, 21 August 2013).

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